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ABSTRACT

School-to-work transition (SWT) programs are comprehensive programs to prepare young people for high-skill, high-wage careers and teach them the basic skills needed to pursue postsecondary education/lifelong learning. Interest in SWT programs has been stimulated by several factors, including declining U.S. competitiveness in the global market, the changing nature of the workplace, and passage of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994. Current Congressional efforts to streamline government may well result in a sharp reduction of the federal role in SWT efforts; however, SWT programs have gained great momentum in many states and will likely continue without strong federal leadership. Research has confirmed that SWT programs can serve a broad cross-section of students and provide access to college and other postsecondary options provided the extra resources and employer support/commitment needed to initiate/implement SWT programs are obtained. Among the issues surrounding SWT programs are whether business/industry has the resources to provide the required work-based learning experience and whether programs force youth to make career choices too early and place too much emphasis on preparing youth for occupations. (Included in this trend analysis are an annotated bibliography of 18 print resources and a list of 6 organizations concerned with SWT programs.) (MN)

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School-to-Work Transition
Trends and Issues Alerts

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

TRENDS AND ISSUES

ALERTS

by Susan Imel

1995

School-to-Work Transition

The idea of helping youth move from school to the workplace is not new; what is new is the conceptualization of school to work as the cornerstone of schooling. Currently, school to work is envisioned as "a systematic, comprehensive, community-wide effort to help all young people (1) prepare for high-skill and high-wage careers, (2) receive top quality academic instruction, and (3) gain the foundation skills to pursue post-secondary education and lifelong learning" (Halperin 1994, p. 4). A number of trends have converged to stimulate the interest in school-to-work transition. These trends, which essentially have to do with economic competitiveness and the changing nature of the workplace, are familiar and can be summed up as follows: the United States is falling behind because it is failing to provide adequate preparation for most new entrants to the workplace, which now demands adaptable and flexible workers with high levels of both academic and technical skills (Brustein and Mahler 1994; National Governors Association 1994).

The passage of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 also spurred interest in the school-to-work transition movement. As a part of its efforts to streamline government, however, the 104th Congress is proposing a major consolidation of employment and training legislation—including school to work—in some form of block grant(s) (D. Stoner, personal communication, January 12, 1995). If these proposed changes are effected, the federal role in school-to-work transition will be sharply reduced. In many states, school-to-work transition programs have gained great momentum and will likely continue without strong federal leadership.

A study of 16 programs (Pauly, Kopp, and Haimson 1994) drew the following conclusions about contemporary transition efforts:

- School-to-work programs use a variety of program designs (i.e., career academies, occupational-academic cluster programs, restructured vocational education, tech prep, and youth apprenticeship), customized to suit local circumstances.
- Programs are able to serve a broad cross-section of students and to provide access to college and other postsecondary options.
- Extra resources are needed to initiate and implement school-to-work programs.
- Providing large numbers of high school students with intensive work-based learning will require a major effort both to recruit additional employers and expand the commitment of employers currently participating.
- School-to-work programs that start early—by grades 9 or 10—can reach students before they become disengaged or drop out of school.

A number of issues affiliated with school to work will need to be addressed as states develop their systems. Some critics feel that school to work is just another example of tracking, but one that will screen out poor and disadvantaged youth (Mendel 1994). Another aspect of this issue is the fear that youth who enter school-to-work programs will be closed out of higher education (Pauly, Kopp, and Haimson 1994). The following questions reflect other issues surrounding school to work: Does it force youth to make career choices too early? Does it place too much emphasis on preparing youth for occupations and not enough on becoming well-informed and contributing citizens? Do business and industry have the resources to provide the required work-based learning experiences? (Mendel 1994; NGA 1994). The following resources can be consulted for further information about school-to-work transition programs.

Print Resources

Brustein, M., and Mahler, M. ***AVA Guide to the School-to-Work Opportunities Act.*** Alexandria, VA: American Vocational Association, 1994.

Following a discussion of the need for the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, this publication presents a detailed discussion and analysis to assist states, educators, employers, and parents in understanding the act and its requirements.

Council of Chief State School Officers and American Youth Policy Forum. ***Building a System to Connect School and Employment.*** Washington, DC: Authors, 1994. (ED 368 938)

This report reflects concerns about the issues related to building a coherent and effective system of youth development and career preparation for young people in the United States.

Halperin, S. ***School to Work: A Larger Vision.*** Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum, 1994.

Halperin challenges educators to construct a total quality system in which each of the parts supports and advances the welfare of all the other parts.

Hamilton, S. F., and Hamilton, M. A. ***Opening Career Paths for Youth: What Can Be Done? Who Can Do It?*** Ithaca, NY: Cornell Youth and Work Program, Cornell University; Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum; Cambridge, MA: Jobs for the Future, 1994.

Describes an approach for developing a career opportunity system and includes recommendations for components of a system and institutional arrangements and responsibilities.

Jobs for the Future. ***Learning that Works: A School-to-Work Briefing Book.*** Cambridge, MA: JFF, 1994.

Provides a quick overview of school-to-work in the United States, including design and implementation issues at the program, state, and national levels and policy innovations that can make it easier for school-to-work to become a significant mainstream educational option.

Katzman, S., ed. ***The Role of Career Education in School-to-Work Transition. Information Series no. 359.*** Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Center on Education and Training for Employment, The Ohio State University, 1995.

Provides an overview of approaches to career education that complement school-to-work transition, including youth appren-

ticeship; career academies; career resource centers; career guidance; and elementary, middle school, and high school career education.

Kazis, R., with P. E. Barton. ***Improving the Transition from School to Work in the United States.*** Cambridge, MA: Jobs for the Future, 1993. (ED 353 454)

Clarifies and describes aspects of the school-to-work transition problems that need "fixing," discusses trends in program and policy innovation at the local, state, and national levels that might respond to the challenges identified, and proposes policies.

McKay, E. G. ***The Forgotten Half: Two-Thirds: An Hispanic Perspective on Apprenticeship, European Style.*** Washington, DC: National Council of La Raza, 1993. (ED 361 431)

Reports on a Hispanic-based consultation on European-style apprenticeships undertaken to add a Hispanic perspective to the current policy debate about apprenticeships as a school-to-work transition option.

Mendel, R. ***The American School-to-Career Movement: A Background Paper for Policymakers and Foundation Officers.*** Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum, 1994.

Presents a critical analysis of the school-to-career movement, including a discussion of the issues surrounding school-to-work movement in the United States.

National Governors Association. ***Developing Systems of School-to-Work Transition: A Report on State Progress. Issue Brief.*** Washington, DC: NGA, 1994.

Points out issues, problems, and challenges and includes tables illustrating state school-to-work system elements and school-to-work programs by state.

Ohio Council on Vocational Education. ***Gathering Momentum! Transition from School to Work.*** Westerville: OCVE, 1995.

Describes Ohio's experience in developing a school-to-work system and profiles 23 Ohio programs.

Pauly, E.; Kopp, H.; and Haimson, J. ***Home-Grown Lessons: Innovative Programs Linking Work and High School.*** New York, NY: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 1994. (ED 369 939)

Presents findings and lessons from 16 innovative school-to-work programs in United States' communities on critical concerns of policy makers, educators, and employers.

Pautler, A. J., Jr., ed. ***High School to Employment Transition: Contemporary Issues.*** Ann Arbor, MI: Prakken Publications, 1994.

This discussion of the transition to employment for noncollege-bound youth is organized around four major themes: background, reviews of research, analysis of programs, and suggestions for improving the transition process.

Polite, V. C. "If Only We Knew Then What We Know Now: The School-to-Work and School-to-College Transitions of African American Males in Suburbia." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, Georgia, April 1993. (ED 362 601)

Reports on a follow-up study of a cohort of 115 African American males who attended a predominately African American suburban school between 1986 and 1989.

Ray, C. A., and Mickelson, R. A. "Restructuring Students for Restructured Work: The Economy, School Reform, and Non-College-Bound Youths." ***Sociology of Education*** 66, no. 1 (January 1993): 1-20.

Argues that structural changes in the U.S. economy have had a negative impact on student motivation and have shaped the current sense of crisis in U.S. education.

Stern, D.; Finkelstein, N.; Stone, J. R., III; Latting, J; and Dornsife, C. ***Research on School-to-Work Transition Programs in the United States.*** Berkeley, CA: National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1994. (ED 369 923)

Reviews existing research on school-to-work programs classified in two main categories: school-and-work arrangements that allow students to work and attend school and school-for-work programs that provide instruction with the express purpose of preparing students for work.

U.S. Department of Education. ***School-to-Work: What Does the Research Say about It?*** Washington, DC: Office of Research, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, USDOE, 1994. (ED 371 206)

The series of commissioned papers that make up this volume address several questions related to school-to-work transition, including what do we know about noncollege-bound youth, what relevant governance issues need to be examined, and where do we go to create a system.

Vocational Education Journal 69, no. 3 (March 1994).

Eight articles of this issue focus on the theme of school-to-work transition.

Resource Organizations

American Youth Policy Forum, 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 719, Washington, DC 20036-5541 (202/775-9731)

Cornell Youth and Work Program, College of Human Ecology, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853-4401 (607/255-8394)

Jobs for the Future, One Bowdoin Square, 11th Floor, Boston, MA 02114 (617/742-5995)

National Governors Association, 444 North Capitol Street, Washington, DC 20001-1572 (202/624-5300)

Youth Policy Institute, 1221 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite B, Washington, DC 20005-5333 (202/638-2144)

S2WTP, an electronic discussion forum on school-to-work transition and tech prep. To subscribe send a message to majordomo@cccins.cccneb.edu with the following command in the body of the message: subscribe s2wtp YOUR INTERNET ADDRESS HERE

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